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Edited by Heather Wood

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music of Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Dameronia on Tadd Dameron, and Sphere on Thelonious Monk.

Sphere is remarkable in that it captures the essence of Monk in all his idiomatic angularity, unexpected harmonies, and sprightly playfulness. The group's bassist, Buster Williams, has called Monk's music so distinctive that "it maintains its own personality no matter who plays it."

Yet the personalities in Sphere are equally distinctive. Tenor saxophonist Charlie Rouse, who played with Monk's quartet for many years, is loose, positive, and flowing, while the original Monk context found him rather deliberate and stately. Pianist Kenny Barron never tries to be Monk, yet his playing is more suggestive of his model than usual. The other two members of the rhythm section—Williams and drummer Ben Riley—provide solid support and colorful, yet subtle, solos. The tunes go beyond the customary Monk repertoire—*Four in One*, *Light Blue*, *Monk's Dream*, *Evidence*, *Reflections*, and *Eronel*—and are thoughtfully and knowledgeably rendered. JOHN S. WILSON

Ralph Sutton: Off the Cuff
Ted Easton, producer
Audiophile AP 163 (3008 Wadsworth Mill Pl., Atlanta, Ga. 30032)

Pianist Ralph Sutton rarely deviates from his characteristic stride style. Yet while "Off the Cuff" includes material by Fats Waller and others of the stride school, it also shows Sutton in a more imaginative mood than usual. His reading of Willie "the Lion" Smith's *Echoes of Spring*, for example, is more assertive than the Lion's treatment. A less familiar tune, Bob Zurke's *Eye Opener*, gets the strong, two-handed drive that is Sutton's dazzling specialty. Another unexpected entry is *Love Lies*, a ballad recorded in 1940 by Frank Sinatra with Tommy Dorsey's orchestra. Sutton resuscitates it with a gently torchy feeling perfectly suited to the melody's 1920s phrases. This and Eubie Blake's *Memories of You* showcase the flowing warmth of his slower tempos.

Though *Muskrat Ramble* and *I Found a New Baby* are standard '20s jazz tunes not associated with stride, Sutton gives them both the full treatment. *Muskrat Ramble* resists but *I Found a New Baby* takes on a jaunty swagger that complements the original feeling of the piece.

All but three tunes are unaccompanied, and Sutton is joined on the exceptions by an uncredited bassist and drummer, presumably from Ted Easton's Dutch Band. With this support to take some of the rhythmic weight off his shoulders, his playing becomes less sternly muscular and more relaxed. JOHN S. WILSON